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ABSTRACT

This paper reviews studies examining the amount of time spent by fathers and mothers in child care activities, characteristics of fathers who spend more time with their children, ways to enhance fathers' child care performance, and the role of parent education in fatherhood. The paper also contains a list of organizations providing resources or training for those interested in fatherhood and family support and a list of World Wide Web resources. The major findings reported in this paper include: (1) most adults agree that parents should equally share child care responsibilities; (2) while mothers still spend more time with children than fathers, the time spent is becoming more equally distributed in terms of supervision and one-on-one activities; (3) most mothers are still in charge of child care, with fathers helping out; (4) the best predictor of the time fathers devote to supervising children was the amount of time parents spent in paid employment, with other predictors including education, race, income, and age and number of children; (5) growing up without a father has negative consequences for children; (6) the work environment and the marital relationship influence fathers' relationship with their children; and (7) parent education programs must be structurally amenable and functionally pertinent for men. (Author/KB)

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## Fathers Caring for Children: Research and Resources

by

Rudy Ray Seward and Dale E. Yeatts

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1

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Selected materials from **Fathers Caring for Children: Research and Resources** (f=ncfr97.mlo)  
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Whether called successful, strong, optimal, effective or alive, healthy families share common traits. One of the most important is spending time together. Both the amount of time and quality of that time shared are critical. Parents' performance of both expressive and instrumental child care activities is a manifestation of their commitment. It should provide joy, comfort, and satisfaction. Expectations for fathers' contributions to child care have changed overtime.

### **1. Expectations for fathers have changed.**

Fathers were considered the primary parent during the American colonial period then became only a peripheral parent as mothers took charge during the industrialization of the United States. Today fathers are supposed to be an equal parenting partners with mothers. Most adults from a variety of surveys agree that mothers and fathers should equally share child care responsibilities. The overwhelming majority of students taking marriage and family college courses support parity between parents. How well do fathers' actions reflect these ideals?

Source: Rotundo, E. A. (1985). American fatherhood: A historical perspective. American Behavioral Scientist, 29, 7-25.

### **2. How much time is spent in child care by mothers and fathers?**

Information from many surveys documents how close fathers' child care fits current expectations. One source is two random telephone surveys of parents, who had a child under the age of 19 living in their home, completed in 1989 (N=180) and repeated in the fall of 1994 (N=134). More than 2,000 telephone numbers for a southwestern community were called each year. The parents participating came from all segments of the population but typically were mothers, white, in their 30's, employed, middle class, and had lived in the community more than 10 years.

In both years the hours fathers said they spent with children per week are higher than previous studies' reports completed over the past six decades. In addition the 1989 and 1994 fathers' proportion of the total parent time spent with children were higher. The impact of mothers' employment upon fathers contribution varied. In 1989 fathers whose spouses were employed did more child care than fathers whose were not employed but the reverse was true in 1994.

While mothers still spend more time with children than fathers, the time spent is becoming more equally distributed both in regard to supervision and one-on-one activities. Much of this is due to employed mothers' spending less time with their children than those not employed.

When asked about decisions and problems related to their children, most parents reported always

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sharing these. However fathers have yet to take as much responsibility for child care (remembering, planning, and scheduling). For example, almost all parents in 1989 (90%) said the mother spent the most time taking care of a sick child and in 1994 the proportion was less but still very high (68%). Also in 1994, only 36% of the mothers reported always sharing day-to-day decisions with fathers.

Fathers typical answers to the questions below suggest that most mothers are still in charge with fathers often just helping out.

- a. Who stays home and calls the school and doctor when your child is sick?
- b. Who checked with friends and neighbors on which baby sitters, child care, and doctors they use?
- c. Who plans and organizes your child's birthday parties and other special events?
- d. Whose calendar contains the dates for your child's school play, soccer games, and other activities?
- e. Who knows your child's shoe size or teachers' names?

Another current source is the National Survey of Families and Households (N=13,017) completed in 1987-88 with a panel follow-up completed in 1993-94. In the earlier survey, almost all (95%) married fathers with a child younger than five years old reported providing some child care every day. More than one-fourth (28%) reported doing three or more hours. This large nationally representative sample documents differences between social groups.

Source: Seward, Rudy Ray; Yeatts, Dale E.; Seward, Jean Ann; & Stanley-Stevens, Leslie (1993). Fathers' Time Spent With Their Children: A Longitudinal Assessment. *Family Perspective*, 27, 275-283.

### **3. Which fathers spend more with their children?**

Parents' child care involvement varies a great deal by their social and economic backgrounds. In the 1989 Southwestern City survey the amount of time parents spent in paid employment was the best predictor of the time fathers' devoted to supervising children. Fathers whose wives worked outside the home increased their supervision of children but provided less supervision the more they worked outside the home. Fathers who devoted the most time to one-on-one activities with their children were typically younger, had fewer and younger children, and were from lower income families. A preliminary analysis of the 1994 survey suggests the same results.

Employment status of the parents accounts for more differences in time spent with children than their gender, religious service attendance, education, social class, income, or their own parents' marital status and employment.

The NSFH fathers exhibited the same patterns and in addition those with less education and who were black reported spending the most time with their children.

In the 1989 survey the time crunch brought on by dual parent employment best explained the increases in both fathers' amount and proportion of participation.

Source: Bozett, Frederick W. & Hanson, Shirley M. H., eds. (1991). Fatherhood and Families in Cultural Context. New York: Springer.

#### **4. Can fathers make a difference?**

Growing up without a father frequently deprives children of important economic, parental, and community resources. Low or a sudden drop in income, inadequate parental guidance and attention plus lack of ties to the community resources put these children at risks. They are more likely to use drug and alcohol, drop out of high school, have a child before age twenty, and be out of work. Absent fathers are usually less committed to their children and trusting of the children's mothers. This undermines children's trust of both parents, increases their uncertainty about the future, weakens connections to other adults and institutions in the community.

Children from father-involved homes tend to have greater self esteem, sense of well-being, empathy, intellectual competence, and academic achievement plus are less susceptible to peer pressure. To succeed as adults, children need intellectual stimulation and to know that working hard and getting a good education pays off. They need a close relationship with a parent who is committed to their well-being and who has the ability and authority to supervise their activities and make sure they stay on track. Also they need adults outside the family who care about them, who support their parents, and who are in a position to help them get established in the adult world.

Source: McLanahan, S. & Sandefur, G., (1994). Growing Up with a Single Parent: What Hurts, What Helps. Cambridge, MA: Harvard.

#### **5. Getting today's fathers to spend more time with children.**

Research findings suggest ways to enhance fathers' performance of child care. The relationship between paid employment and family is very important. These are not separate worlds, nor are employees' families passive agents dependent upon work place demands. The communication and cooperative skills needed in some jobs can have a positive spill over to the family. In a study of self-managed work teams, employees who characterized their jobs as making good use of their skills and having skill variety, high autonomy, good communication, and cooperation were likely to report that their jobs positively affected their family life.

Also, on the job, employees should take a proactive approach. Workers need to take advantage of family supportive opportunities (e.g., fathers should take paternity and parental leave as appropriate instead of vacation time) and make adjustments and even demands for further compatibility between the family and work places. Researchers, practitioners, and individuals must not automatically assume that employment has only negative effects. Creative and cooperative ways of blending the work and family worlds must be explored. Work situations and benefits can complement the family (e.g., reduced work weeks, work at home, flexible scheduling, work-site or nearby child care).

The marital relationship is also an important factor. A father with unresolved marital conflict is likely to be withdrawn, distant, and less emotionally available to their children. Strengthening the marital relationship helps the parent to child relationship. The phenomenon of serial parenting by

step fathers suggests just how important the marital bond can be to men in motivating parental behavior.

Further flexible, consensual gender role beliefs, a sense of balance and fairness in relationships, and both individual and family resources affect fathers' involvement.

No simple solutions exist to getting fathers to share more. Resistance to change is due to many factors including low motivation (must want to change); lack of skill, training or confidence (can learn); lack of social support (including mothers who are not willing to give up prerogatives); and the greedy demands of employment (denying fathers resources).

Possible steps toward sharing more child care:

- a. Fathers, choose a chore you have not done before, such as preparing a meal, and do it once a week.
- b. Mothers let fathers do it their way and avoid criticism or redoing the job "right."
- c. Fathers use this new task to nurture communication, establish rituals, and increase time family is together.
- d. Fathers "date" your spouse regularly to nurture marital intimacy.
- e. Fathers form a strong alliance with mothers on child care decisions. The assumed answer to every child's request should be "no" until mom and dad can talk it over.
- f. Fathers discuss some decisions with mothers in front of your child. Disagreements should be aired and the process of working toward a fair solution demonstrated.
- g. Fathers take any opportunities available from employers to be with your child.
- h. Now fathers, once your new task becomes established, branch out to more meals or other tasks.

Parent education programs for fathers must be structurally amenable and functionally pertinent for men. Active and strategic recruitment efforts are a must. Direct mailings or contact through the work place or in a recreational setting is best especially for adolescent fathers and fathers with minority and lower socioeconomic backgrounds. Coupling practical assistance, such as, job training, with parent education can be an important incentive for young fathers. Locations and time also must be convenient. Work, church, recreational, or school centers and even home visitations should be pursued (must involve institutions/community). Fathers need to feel comfortable and welcome. It is also important to reflect fathers' unique styles of interaction with children. Providing play time together or sharing a hobby can be ways to get fathers involved in education programs.

Source: James A. Levine with Edward W. Pitt (1995). New Expectations: Community Strategies for Responsible Fatherhood. New York: Families and Work Institute.

#### **6. What resources are available?**

Materials available include publications dealing with demographics, history, social policy, strategic objectives, and program descriptions. These materials may be accessed through resource organizations, training organizations, publishers, and the Internet. See attached pages for selected examples.

# Fatherhood and Family Support

The following organizations provide resources and/or training to those who are interested in fatherhood and family support. Some provide direct services to fathers and families; others produce written materials. This list is adapted in part from *New Expectations: Community Strategies for Responsible Fatherhood* by James A. Levine and Edward W. Pitt.

## Resource Organizations

### **Center on Fathers, Families, and Public Policy**

Family Resource Coalition  
200 South Michigan Avenue, 16th Floor  
Chicago, IL 60604

312/341-0900 (phone)  
312/341-9361 (fax)

Examines the legal and social service support systems available to never-married, low-skilled, and low-income fathers. Works to educate the public and policymakers about the need for public policies that will assist the never-married, low-income father in moving to complete involvement with his child or children.

### **Children's Rights Council**

220 Eye Street NE, Suite 200  
Washington, D.C. 20002-4362  
202/547-6227 (phone)  
Works to strengthen families through education and advocacy; favors family formation and family preservation, but if families break up or are never formed, works to ensure a child frequent and continuing contact with two parents and extended family.

### **The Fatherhood Project**

Families and Work Institute  
330 Seventh Avenue  
New York, NY 10001  
212/465-2044, ext. 2003 (phone)  
212/465-8637 (fax)  
National research and education project that examines ways to support male involvement in child rearing.

### **Father-to-Father**

Children, Youth, and Family Consortium  
University of Minnesota  
12 McNeal Hall  
1985 Buford Hall  
St. Paul, MN 55108  
612/626-1212

Inspired by Vice President Al Gore to promote responsible fatherhood in communities across the United States.

### **National Center on Fathers and Families**

Philadelphia Children's Network  
Graduate School of Education  
University of Pennsylvania  
Philadelphia, PA 19104  
215/686-3910 (phone)  
215/686-3908 (fax)  
Established to develop and implement a practice-focused research agenda that expands the knowledge base on father involvement.

### **National Fatherhood Initiative**

600 Eden Road  
Building E  
Lancaster, PA 17601  
717/581-8860  
Public media campaign highlighting the absence of fathers in many families; advocates responsible fatherhood as the solution to this national crisis.

### **National Practitioners' Network for Fathers and Families**

Families and Work Institute  
330 Seventh Avenue

New York, NY 10001  
212/465-2044 ext. 2003 (phone)  
212/465-8637 (fax)  
Is comprised of service providers, researchers, policymakers, and funders who share and provide information on fathers and families. Seeks to educate the public on developments in the field of fatherhood and family support.

## Training Organizations

### **Avance**

301 South Frio, Suite 310  
San Antonio, TX 78207  
210/270-4630  
Community-based family support program for low-income Latino parents and their children; offers a special curriculum for fathers.

### **MELD for Young Dads**

MELD  
123 North Third Street, Suite 507  
Minneapolis, MN 55401  
612/332-7563 (phone)  
612/344-1959 (fax)  
A network of 10 programs in six states that work to connect fathers with their children; about 70 programs in 20 states have replicated this model, which focuses on peer education.

### **National Center for Fathering**

10200 West 75th Street  
Shawnee Mission, KS 66204  
913/384-4661 (phone)  
913/384-4665 (fax)  
Researches fathering practices, provides training seminars for fathers, and conducts public education on fatherhood issues.

## **National Fathers' Network**

Kindering Center  
16120 NE Eighth Street  
Bellevue, WA 98008  
206/747-4004

Established to provide support to men whose children are born with or develop special needs.

## **National Institute for Responsible Fatherhood and Family Revitalization**

1090 Vermont Avenue NW, Suite 1100  
Washington, D.C. 20005-4961  
202/789-6376

Encourages fathers to form bonds with their children through individual counseling, education, and mentors.

## **Public/Private Ventures**

2005 Market Street, Suite 90  
Philadelphia, PA 19103-7009  
800/755-4778 or 215/557-4463  
(phone) 215/557-4469 (fax)

Manages and evaluates social policy initiatives to help young people, especially the hard-to-serve, become productively employed and self-sufficient. Operates an Unwed Fathers Program that offers job training, educational services, counseling, and fatherhood development training.

## **Publications**

Many of the organizations listed above can recommend resources other than those listed here. Some of the following book descriptions are adapted from *New Expectations: Community Strategies for Responsible Fatherhood* by James A. Levine and Edward W. Pitt.

### **Circles of Care and Understanding: Support Programs for Fathers of Children With Special Needs**

by James E. May  
1992 (Bethesda, Md.: Association for Care of Children's Health, 301/654-6549)

A practical guidebook on how to develop a support program for fathers whose children have special needs.

### **Climbing Jacob's Ladder: The Enduring Legacy of African American Families**

by Andrew Billingsley  
1992 (New York: Simon and Schuster)  
Available from FRC, 312/341-0900

A unique view of the strengths, diversity, and resiliency of African American families. Billingsley describes the major economic and social forces that have led to the socioeconomic situation of African American fathers and families today. The book dispels common myths, misconceptions, misunderstandings, and misinformation about African American families.

### **Fatherhood in America: A History**

by Robert Griswold  
1993 (New York: Basic Books, 212/207-7528).

The first full-scale historical analysis of men's lives as fathers, which shows how the cultural ideal of fatherhood has been redefined in response to changing economic and social circumstances.

### **Fatherless America: Confronting Our Most Urgent Social Problem**

by David Blankenhorn  
1995 (New York: Basic Books, 212/207-7528).

Argues that fatherlessness is the driving factor behind every major American social problem, including teenage pregnancy, crime, violence against women, juvenile delinquency, substance abuse, and child poverty.

### **Father Love: What We Need, What We Seek, What We Must Create**

by Richard Louv  
1993 (New York: Pocket Books, 212/698-7000 or 800/223-2336).

Based on extensive interviews with fathers, mothers, and children across America, *Father Love* connects the personal experience of fatherhood to the broader social need to care for all children.

### **Fathers**

by Ross Parke  
1996 (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 617/495-2577). An accessible review of child development research on the role of fathers.

### **Getting Men Involved: Strategies for Early Childhood Programs**

by James A. Levine, Dennis T. Murphy, and Sherrill Wilson  
1993 (Scholastic Inc.)  
Available from FRC: 312/341-0900

This workbook shows early childhood programs how they can encourage and support men in becoming active fathers and care-givers. Also includes portraits of 14 successful programs and a list of programs that work with fathers and materials on fathers.

### **The Heart of a Father: How Dads Can Shape the Destiny of America**

by Ken Canfield  
1996 (Chicago: Northfield Publishing, 800/593-DADS).  
(National Center for Fathering)  
Discusses the life cycle approach to the development of fathers and their children.

**Life Without Father: Compelling New Evidence That Fatherhood and Marriage Are Indispensable for the Good of Children and Society**

by David Popenoe

1996 (New York: Free Press, 212/702-4771).

Argues that fatherlessness is the driving factor behind every major American social problem. Includes a careful review of social science research.

**New Expectations: Community Strategies for Responsible Fatherhood**

by James A. Levine and Edward W. Pitt  
1995 (New York: Families and Work Institute)

Available from FRC 312/341-0900

Offers a new way of thinking and acting to promote responsible fatherhood, including a jargon-free review of research, state-of-the-art review of community-based strategies, tips from leading practitioners, and a guide to more than 300 programs nationwide and to the 100 most useful publications.

**Nurturing Young Black Males: Challenges to Agencies, Programs, and Social Policy**

by Ronald B. Mincy

1994 (Washington, D.C.: Urban Institute Press, 202/833-7200).

Discusses the unique socioeconomic, psychological, and cultural problems of young African American males and how agencies, social programs, and social policymakers must develop new initiatives and strategies for dealing with these problems.

**The Nurturing Father**

by Kyle Pruett

1987 (New York: Warner Books, 212/522-7200).

A groundbreaking study of the impact on children, mothers, and fathers when fathers take on the primary childrearing role.

**The Way We Never Were: American Families and the Nostalgia Trap**

by Stephanie Coontz

1992 (New York: Basic Books, 212/207-7528).

Offers a historical analysis of prevalent myths about American family values and what families used to be like. Without minimizing the serious new problems that many American families face, Coontz warns that nostalgia for a largely mythical past of traditional values is a trap that can only cripple our capacity to solve today's problems.

— On-Line Resources —

**World Wide Web**

<http://www.cyfc.umn.edu>

FatherNet at University of Minnesota provides electronic access to reviews of research, on-line discussions, and notices on events related to fatherhood, as part of the national Father-to-Father initiative started by Vice President Al Gore. Order a starter kit for initiating local Father-to-Father activities on-line.

<http://www.isc.org/men/nofather/nodad.html>

Includes a virtual library of articles, commentary, statistics, and books, and a list of other web sites on fatherhood and fatherlessness.

<http://www.nas.edu/nap/online/amerfath>

Gives general information about fatherhood issues in the United States.

<http://www.xs4all.nl/~sheldon/homepage.html>

The Fathering Homepage:  
~~Lists articles and stories from~~  
Fathering Magazine. Contains a bibliography of published materi-

al of interest to fathers. links to other web sites related to fatherhood, and a subject index covering everything from adoption to child abuse to single parenting.

**HandsNet**

Children, Youth, and Families Forum

Several folders indirectly address fatherhood issues. The best way to access information about fatherhood is to conduct a keyword search in related directories. Keyword searches on "fathers" and "fatherhood" have produced information in the following locations:

**Early Childhood folder**

- Parent Education directory
- Resources for Parents
- Parenting and Family Support directory

**Youth Development folder**

- Citizenship and Social Development
- Prevention Programs, Strategies, and Issues

**Child Welfare folder**

- Prevention and Early Intervention
- Family Support News

**Table 1: Amount and proportion of time spent with children in various activities, as reported by married fathers and mothers in 1989 and 1994**

Type of Activity	Number of Hours Per Week				Fathers' % of Total Time	
	Mothers		Fathers		1989	1994
	1989	1994	1989	1994		
Supervision	43.0	34.9	24.1*	21.6*	36	38
One-on-one	15.5	27.3	9.5*	16.5*	38	38
Transportation	4.5	6.5	2.9*	2.9*	39	31
Number of Cases	85	70	53	39	53	39

Source: *Southwestern City probability samples, 1989 & 1994.*

\* significant at .05

**Table 3: Married employed fathers' reported percent of total parents' time and hours per week devoted to housework and child care from 1931 to 1994**

Activities	Robinson's Data <sup>a</sup>		Juster's Data <sup>b</sup>			Southwestern City Data <sup>c</sup>	
	1931-33	1954	1965	1975	1981	1989	1994
<b>CHILD CARE &amp; HOUSEWORK<sup>d</sup></b>							
% performed by father	21	14	20	27	29	35	35
# of hours/week spent by fathers	4	6	11.8	13.4	15.4	17.5	25.4
<hr/>							
<b>ONE-ON-ONE ACTIVITIES</b>							
% performed by fathers	N/A	N/A	N/A	22	25	38	38
# of hours/week spent by fathers	N/A	N/A	N/A	2.3	2.9	9.5	16.5
Sample Size	375	4,250	272	119	119	180	134
Sampling Frame	county	-----	national	-----	-----	city	---

<sup>a</sup> Robinson, 1985:294

<sup>b</sup> Juster, 1985:320 & 328; The 1975 and 1981 data are from a panel study.

<sup>c</sup> Southwestern City probability sample, 1989

<sup>d</sup> Child care and housework are combined to allow for comparisons across data sets.

**Table 4: Married employed fathers' reported percent of total parents' time and hours per week devoted to housework and child care in husband only (HO) versus dual earner families from 1965 to 1994**

Activity Type	Pleck's Data <sup>a</sup>				Southwestern City Data <sup>b</sup>			
	1965-66		1975-76		1989		1994	
	HO	Dual	HO	Dual	HO	Dual	HO	Dual
<b>CHILD CARE &amp; HOUSEWORK</b>								
% performed by father	12	22	21	32	28	39	32	35
# of hours/ week spent by fathers	7.7	7.0	12.8	13.1	16.8	17.8	30.2	22.5
<b>ONE-ON-ONE ACTIVITIES</b>								
% performed by fathers	---N/A---		18	27	28	44	36	37
# of hours/ week spent by fathers	---N/A---		1.8	1.7	7.8	10.3	20.7	14.0
Sample Size	2,032		2,406		180		134	
Sampling Frame	-----national-----				-----city-----			

HO = Husband Only Earner; Dual = Both Spouses Earn Income

<sup>a</sup> Figures based upon data cited in Pleck (1985:30 & 41) for married couples where husband is employed.

<sup>b</sup> Southwestern City probability samples, 1989 & 1994.

Table 1: Multiple regression analysis of factors affecting fathers' time spent with children and fathers' proportion of total time both parents spent supervising children from Southwestern City, 1989

Factors	Hours spent supervising children		Hours spent one-on-one with children		Proportion of total time spent	
	Beta	b	Beta	b	Beta	b
<b>Socioeconomic Status:</b>						
Father's age	.24	-.65	-.30*	-.33	.03	.00
Father's education	.00	.04	-.06	-.27	.17	.01
Family income	-.08	-1.40	-.24*	-1.56	.11	.01
Father believes girls should be independent	.07	2.81	-.12	-1.95	-.14	-.04
Father felt close to own father when teen	-.04	-.90	-.02	-.19	.01	.00
<b>Employment:</b>						
Hours mother employed per week	.21	.21	.20	.08	.54***	.00
Hours father employed per week	-.41**	-.78	-.10	-.07	-.31*	-.00
Hours father does housework per week	-.00	-.02	.02	.03	.18	.00
<b>Family Structure:</b>						
Number of children	-.24	-5.32	-.38**	-3.38	-.18	-.03
Sons only	-.14	-5.85	-.08	-1.25	.00	.00
Preschool children	.17	6.93	.25*	4.10	-.04	-.01
Adjusted $R^2$		.50		.66		.39
F (11, 36)		5.26***		9.20***		3.75**

Note: n=47. Listwise deletion resulted in a loss of 12 cases.

\* p < .05 \*\* p < .01 \*\*\* p < .001



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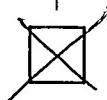
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